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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR POPE BENEDICT XVI'S APRIL 15-20 VISIT TO  
WASHINGTON, DC AND NEW YORK

REF: A) VATICAN 17 AND PREVIOUS B) VATICAN 31

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CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Deputy Chief of Mission,  
EXEC, State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Pope is likely to highlight faith and reason, natural law, human rights, and inter-religious dialogue during his upcoming trip to the US. He is also likely to address environmental issues and express concern for the plight of Christians in the Middle East. The Pope appreciates the President's stand on bio-ethics and against abortion. Secretary Bertone is likely to discuss Cuba and the Middle East on his discussion with Secretary Rice. The Pope and Secretary Bertone will most likely thank the USG for our assistance to less developed countries, particularly in Africa. From our conversations with Holy See officials, it seems that the Vatican is still working on the substance of the Pope's meetings. Post will update the Department on any additional information we may receive. Following are our best guesses about the content of the Pope's address to the UN and his meeting with the President.  
End summary.

Introduction

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¶2. (C) The April 15-20 visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Washington and New York promises to be significant for both the United States and the Holy See. It will be the first official U.S. visit for Pope Benedict, who was an infrequent visitor to the United States even before becoming Pope in 2005 (having been only twice in the past 15 years). It will also mark only the second papal visit in history to the White House, following that of Pope John Paul II in 1979. As with all papal visits, the primary purpose is pastoral. While this activity is of great importance to the Church, we will not address it in this cable.

¶3. (C) Apart from strictly pastoral concerns, Pope Benedict will certainly also be conscious of the symbolic and substantive importance of his visits to the White House and to the United Nations (which was the original purpose of the trip). This Pope is less charismatic than his famous predecessor, John Paul II, though he retains great popularity and respect. Benedict, as befits a longtime professor, is primarily an authoritative thinker and a teacher; his speeches no less than his writings are carefully crafted and focus more on constructing logical arguments than on poetry or dramatic effects.

¶4. (C) The essential link between faith and reason has been one of Benedict's frequent themes, and one he is likely to sound again in the U.S. In Regensburg in September of 2006, he used this approach to argue that religion and violence are fundamentally incompatible, but even more to stress that Europe (hence also the modern West) was fundamentally shaped by the dual inheritance of Greek philosophy and Biblical faith. Benedict concludes that the West today must preserve this marriage of faith and reason against the danger of hyper-secularization ("the dictatorship of relativism") and the loss of absolute moral values based on human dignity.

The Pope in New York

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¶5. (C) Although he will be at the UN for about three hours, Benedict is allotted only 20 minutes for his speech to the United Nations General Assembly (though he might stretch that by a few minutes). This is just as well, since he will need to focus his message tightly. He will be very conscious of the powerful precedent of John Paul II's 1995 UN address, which built on the then-recent collapse of communism to emphasize human rights, the role of the UN as a "moral center", and the need for nations to work together for justice, peace, and solidarity with the poor. Whatever the specifics of Pope Benedict's address, it will be informed by these same broad considerations. The sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights gives the Pope another good reason to focus on human rights in particular.

¶6. (C) We understand from our Holy See contacts that the Pope will touch on inter-religious dialogue in his address to the United Nations; he has praised the U.S. in the past for our experience and efforts in this area. We judge that the Pope is sincerely committed to inter-religious dialogue (reftel A), but

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his even stronger commitment to the Church's evangelical imperative will continue to complicate the course of dialogue with Islam during this papacy.

¶7. (C) There has been speculation that the Pope will address the environment -- understood as respect for creation -- at the UN, though we haven't been able to confirm that. The Holy See believes that human beings are at the center of the environment, and therefore have inescapable responsibilities to steward it. The Holy See's approach, while typically understated, clearly favors serious international cooperation now to address what it considers a grave threat to the Earth; it also suggests that wealthier nations have a correspondingly greater responsibility. Benedict might also choose to explore "human ecology" (as he did in his January 2007 World Day of Peace message), which carries social as well as economic and scientific implications.

¶8. (C) Whatever his specific topics may be, Benedict is certain to weave them into an overarching theme stressing the essential role of the United Nations as a moral voice, and the need for international relations to be based on an unchanging natural moral law. He dwelt on this, for example, in a recent address to Catholic NGOs, decrying "lack of concern for economic and social needs of poorer nations", "contempt for humanitarian law", and "selective defense of human rights". A senior Vatican contact also tipped us to Benedict's address a year ago to European bishops, which focuses on very similar themes: respect for the environment, structured access to energy resources, incentives for solidarity with the poor, the foundational role of Christianity in Europe, the reaffirmation of universal values, and the existence of natural law as the source of all rights. Most relevant of all, in the Pope's

welcoming remarks to Ambassador Glendon a few weeks ago, he also emphasized common moral law as a basis for human rights. In that welcome were also present the Church's regular denunciations of nuclear weapons and the arms race, and clear encouragement for the U.S. to continue efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

#### Pope's Meeting with President Bush

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¶9. (C) During the President's visit to the Pope last June, they discussed a number of topics: Palestine, Holy See-Israel relations, Lebanon, Iraq, Christians in the Middle East, China, Africa, and Latin America. (Post does not have further detail on this conversation.) We would expect the Pope to mention some of these topics again, specifically the still unresolved problems between the Holy See and Israel, but at a fairly general level. He may also prefer to focus entirely on broader topics such as peace or religious freedom. Benedict to date has not devoted much attention to foreign affairs, preferring to leave this in the hands of his Secretary of State, Cardinal Bertone.

¶10. (C) The Pope has a well-known appreciation of the United States as a country which is both secular in its institutions and highly religious in its culture -- in contrast to Europe, his principal preoccupation. He is also a kind and gracious man who will look forward to a warm conversation with the President; he will likely mention his planned April 20 visit to Ground Zero so as to express solidarity with the United States in combating terrorism, and also praise the President's stand on bioethics, abortion and immigration. However, the Pope's admiration for the U.S. is not unlimited. He is often critical of many aspects of modern market economies such as that of the United States, including too much emphasis on consumption, individualism, consumerism and materialism, and too little solidarity with the poor. Similarly, while the Holy See has refrained in recent years from criticizing the war in Iraq (which it vigorously opposed at the outset), it remains convinced that the war was an error which has destabilized the Middle East and endangered Christian communities there.

¶11. (C) We suggest emphasizing the role of the United States and the Catholic Church as the world's largest provider and distributor, respectively, of humanitarian aid around the world -- and especially in Africa. This will resonate with the Pope, and may also help to raise the Holy See's appreciation of how much the United States helps the world through private as well as public contributions.

Cardinal Bertone

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¶12. (C) While the Pope meets alone with the President, Cardinal Bertone will meet Secretary Rice -- accompanied by the Papal Nuncio and Ambassador Glendon. As Bertone does not speak English, the effective time of the meeting will be reduced owing to the need for interpreting. This will be the best opportunity for us to raise key issues, as Bertone has a very strong voice over the Holy See's foreign policy. Bertone is fairly outspoken, and somewhat egotistic as well. He has spoken strongly in favor of international organizations in contexts which make clear his distaste for the war in Iraq (including references to "unilateralism" and "the idolatry of technology"). In this he reflects also the views of key subordinates, such as Archbishop Filoni -- the nuncio in Baghdad in 2003, now the Sostituto -- who will be present on the visit. We would expect Bertone to call for increased support for the United Nations as a moral force -- previewing a likely theme for the Pope's UN address.

¶13. (C) During his meeting with the President last June, Bertone

focused on the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. He described the suffering of Christians in the Middle East and the need for unity in Lebanon, and suggested that the U.S. be more open to Iran, offering the Holy See's good offices in this regard. Bertone appreciated the important American contributions in Africa, including campaigns against hunger, corruption, and infectious diseases. He complained about persecution of the Church in Rwanda, and the President promised to look into it. Bertone also pressed for action in Sudan. After brief discussion of China and Venezuela, the President and Bertone discussed Cuba, with the cardinal taking a somewhat more positive view of that country. In conclusion, Bertone praised the U.S. pro-life and pro-family stands.

¶14. (C) For his meeting with Secretary Rice, Bertone is likely to raise Cuba. Ambassador Glendon called on Bertone just after his return from Havana, and he was eager to discuss it (reftel B). The cardinal's statements about his trip were generally positive, and he appears convinced that things there are looking up both for the Church and for society overall. Bertone is more optimistic than the USG about Raul Castro. He will press for the U.S. to lift its "embargo". We suggest responding that easing of economic sanctions is necessarily linked to substantial, actual improvements in human rights in Cuba, and anything the Church can do to speed this will be welcome.

¶15. (C) Bertone is sure to raise the plight of Christians in the Middle East, and more likely than the Pope to suggest that U.S. policy there has been too unilateral and not well considered.

Christians have been emigrating from Iraq, Lebanon, and other parts of the Middle East in large numbers, and historic Christian communities (such as the Chaldeans) are in real danger of dropping below sustainable levels.

¶16. (C) On Lebanon and Israeli/Palestinian issues, Bertone may suggest that the U.S. be more inclusive in its negotiations -- i.e., work with Syria, Iran, and Hamas. The Holy See is well aware of our views on this, but is itself committed by nature to broad dialogue. The Holy See's bilateral relationship with Israel has been a source of considerable frustration because the Vatican feels that Israel has acted in bad faith since the signing of the Fundamental Agreement in 1994. Bertone may ask for additional U.S. support in pressing Israel to be more cooperative.

¶17. (C) While the topic of China may arise, we would not expect Bertone to seek anything from the U.S. in this regard. The Holy See prefers to keep a low profile in its long and patient effort to reach diplomatic agreement with Beijing, and has in the past asked the U.S. to avoid raising this with the Chinese -- though general calls for religious freedom are welcome.

Comment

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¶18. (C) Pope Benedict is a voluminous writer, churning out books, encyclicals, speeches, and many other documents (composing in longhand) on a wide range of subjects. This, combined with the habitual opacity of the Vatican Curia about the Pope's intentions, makes it hard to predict what he may say to the President or to the United Nations; moreover it is clear from our conversations that the visit is still a work in progress for the Holy See. Post will continue to engage Curia officials at all levels and will update the Department on any

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additional information we may receive regarding the Pope's visit.  
GLENDON